Reading difficulties (RD) cost the UK economy ~ 2 billion p.a.\(^1\) We conduct longitudinal studies with large, heterogeneous groups of beginning readers to examine which early skills are critical for reading and uncover what is different about the children who struggle to learn to read.

Influence of pre-reading skills

- Learning a “decoding” strategy (sound out letters, blend them to say word)
- Speech-sound awareness is critical (e.g., say the first sound in “bat”). Speeded naming, auditory skills and memory also important.
- Learning familiar words by sight Early print knowledge critical (basic skills less important)

Changes from beginner to intermediate reader

- Current project (with Caroline Witton, Joel Talcott, Kim Rochelle & Adrian Burgess): tracking changes in the influence of speech-sound skills vs. more general auditory skills with development.
- Our pilot work suggests that both speech-sound and auditory deficits can cause RD. Evidence of a shift in reliance from broad auditory skills to more specific speech skills as children become more proficient readers.

Improving basic, whole-class teaching for beginner readers can reduce the incidence of reading difficulties (e.g., Shapiro & Solity, 2008). Current work: do some types of reading programme protect against the influence of early difficulties?

Contact: Dr. Laura Shapiro (L.R.Shapiro@aston.ac.uk)
